



SIGBI'S 90TH ANNIVERSARY

Siew Yong Gnanalingam
SI President 2024 - 2025

Welcome

Dear President Ruth and Soroptimist Sisters

Before we get started, I would like to take a moment to express my heartfelt gratitude to SIGBI's Past President, Cathy Cottridge for the gracious act of giving me a time slot for handing over the Chain of Office Ceremony by then SI President Maureen Maguire in London at the SIGBI Conference last year.



Congratulations SIGBI!

Time has flown, and here we are celebrating SIGBI' 90th anniversary. What a wonderful granite milestone!

Please give yourselves a round of applause for this incredible journey.

Thank you SIGBI President Ruth for your kind invitation to attend this auspicious conference.



SIGBI

It's truly remarkable that you are part of a network with over 5,000 members in 250 clubs across 18 countries.

From Great Britain and Ireland, to Asia and the Caribbean, you are a diverse and vibrant community dedicated to Educating, Empowering and Enabling Women and Girls. It's a privilege to be part of such an impactful organization, as though, jokes aside, sometimes I wonder how we manage to coordinate all our wonderful work without a time machine.



EDUCATE

EMPOWER

ENABLE

Enable



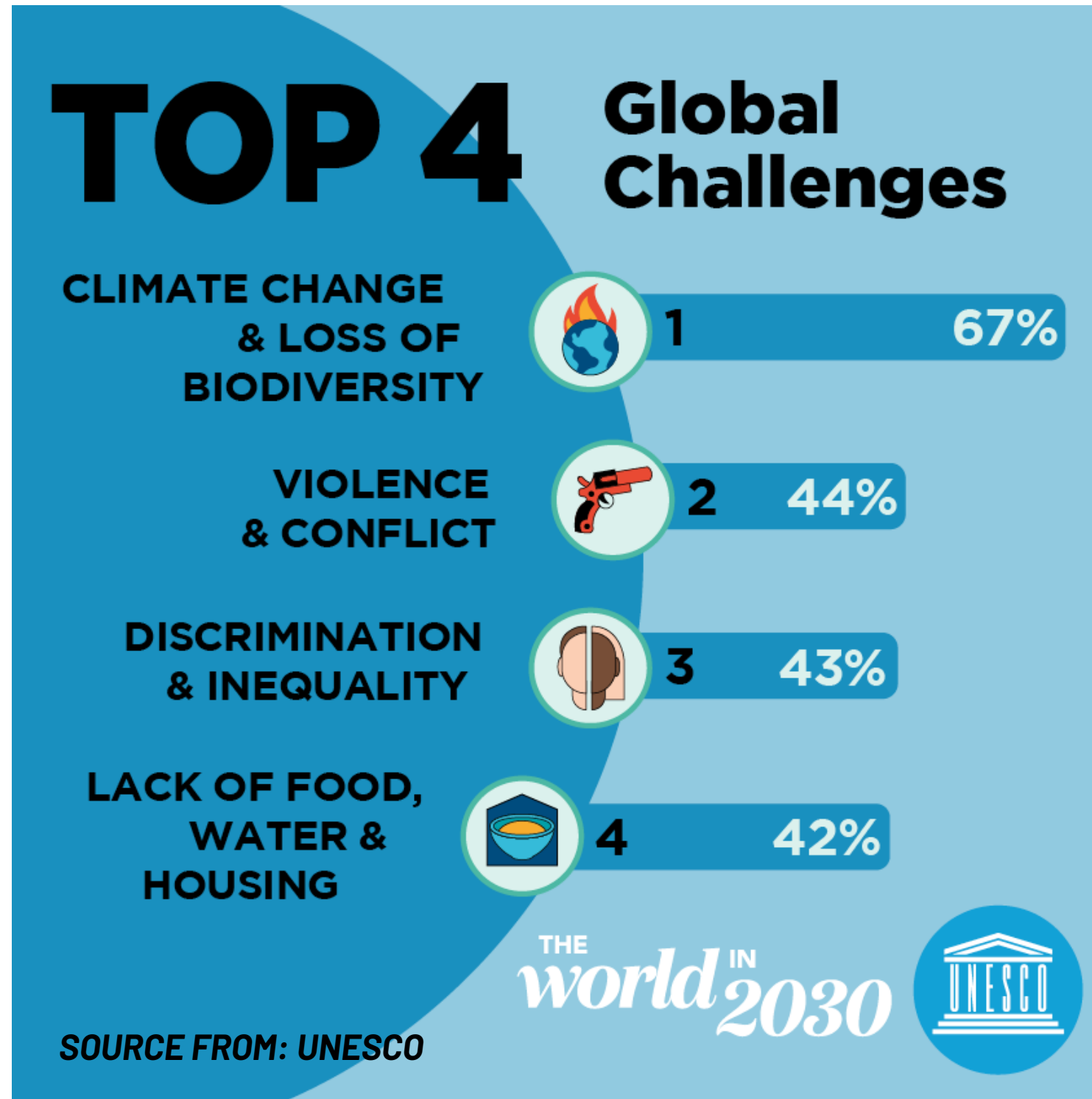
As you know, the Conference has been split into three parts, and for this session, the theme is 'Enable'. The word itself speaks to the heart of our work as Soroptimists, giving women and girls the tools, opportunities and support they need to rise, to achieve and to make their voices heard. When President Ruth Healey, asked me to speak about my travels to various UN Centres and the Conferences I've attended during my presidency, it became clear how fitting this theme is.

ENABLE

Global challenges



Every conference, every meeting and every visit I've made has been centered around the mission of enabling communities to address pressing global challenges, enabling women to take leadership roles and enabling meaningful change through collaboration.



Global challenges



From discussions on gender equality, eradicating poverty to climate action, I've witnessed first hand how we, as soroptimists, play a crucial role in enabling others.



GENDER EQUALITY



ERADICATING POVERTY

It's through our collective efforts on the ground that we truly enable progress both locally and globally.



CLIMATE ACTION

Connecting



As President, my role extends across many areas, from chairing SI board meetings, topic discussions, and global policy and SI convention meetings, to attending all committee meetings as an ex-officio member.

These responsibilities not only keep me closely engaged in oversight of our organisation, but they also provide insight into the incredible work happening across Soroptimist International, especially our global advocacy work through our representation at UN centres and participation and collaboration with important NGOs on important statements and stances on matters of importance, seeking the rise of women.

One of the most meaningful aspects of my role has been the opportunity to connect with the membership through our Federations at your conference and key meetings and most importantly the work you do.

Learning experiences



My position has allowed me to meet many of our members face-to-face, fostering personal connections that truly bring to life the power of our global network. Each interaction reaffirms the sense of unity and shared purpose that drives us forward.

Additionally, I've had the privilege of attending two key UN sessions. These experiences have been particularly eye-opening, offering me a deeper understanding of critical advocacy issues that affect women and girls worldwide.

I've also had the opportunity to work closely with our dedicated UN representatives, whose tireless advocacy on our behalf brings our mission to global platforms. Through them, I've come to appreciate even more the vital role Soroptimist International plays in influencing policies that impact women everywhere.

UNEA-6

My first official engagement as President was at the UNEA-6 in Nairobi, held at the United Nations Environment Programme Centre. The theme of UNEA-6 was a powerful one: “effective, inclusive, and sustainable multilateral actions to tackle climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution.”



UNEA-6

It was an honour to be part of such an important global discussion, where the urgent need to address these environmental challenges was at the forefront.



Kenya



During my time there, I had the privilege of connecting with global women's groups, SI Kenya network members, and our UN representatives. These connections were invaluable, as they not only strengthened our global network but also highlighted the critical role Soroptimist International plays in advocating for women and girls, particularly in the face of complex issues like climate change.



Kenya

Another memorable experience during my visit to Nairobi was arranged by Mary Muai, the Nairobi UN Centre SI Representative, who organised a visit to the Nairobi central club's project: 'The Greening of Kibera.' this project, focused on the 'plant a tree, grow a forest' initiative, was both timely and deeply relevant, aligning perfectly with my biennial theme, 'Save Mother Earth, Save the Future.'



Kenya

I also had the opportunity to meet and connect with H.E. Dr. Leila Benali, President of UNEA-6 who is also Minister of Energy Transition and Sustainable Development, Morocco.



Kenya

At a reception at UNEA-6, I had the privilege of meeting The Honorable Soipan Tuya, Cabinet Secretary of Environment, Climate Change, and Forestry, Kenya.



Kenya

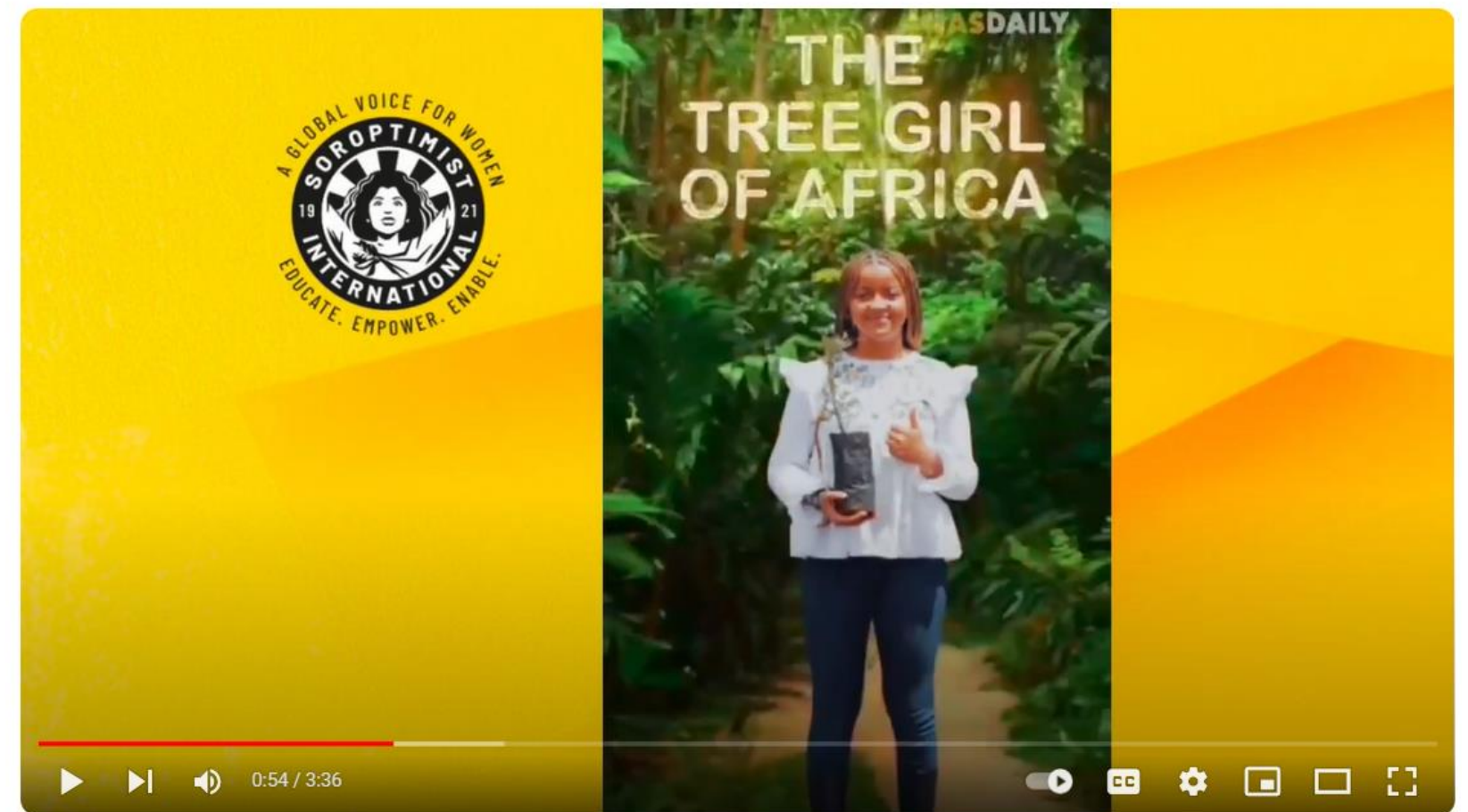
A notable highlight from my visit to Nairobi was the courtesy call on The Honourable Mary Muthoni Muruiki, the Principal Secretary of the State Department for Public Health and professional standards. this meeting was a wonderful opportunity for us to highlight the impactful work being done by Soroptimist International Africa Federation (SIAF), particularly the cervical cancer projects that have been making a real difference in the region.



Kenya

I was particularly inspired by the remarkable journey of a young girl from Kenya, Ellyanne Wanjiku Chlystun, starting her tree-planting mission at just four years old. She inspired her community to plant 1.3 million trees by the age of 13.

Her story is a powerful reminder of how one individual's passion can spark significant change and the importance of coming together to protect our planet for future generations.



CSW68

In March, I had the honour of attending the 68th Commission on the Status of Women (CSW68) in New York, where the focus was on “accelerating gender equality and empowering all women and girls by addressing poverty and strengthening institutions with a gender perspective.”



CSW68

I was honored to take part in SI parallel events/sessions such as 'Addressing Gendered Poverty: Best Practices and Lessons Learned' and 'The Intersections of Gender, Poverty, and Climate Change'. working closely with our SI Advocacy Director, Leigh Ellwood Brown, I gained valuable insights into the interconnectedness of these issues and how we can effectively advocate for the empowerment and enabling of women and girls for a better future.



CSW68

I also had the honour of delivering opening remarks for the session ‘Shaping a Brighter Tomorrow: Economic Safety and Gender-based Violence Prevention,’ organised by the Taiwan Coalition Against Violence and SI.

Additionally, I provided closing remarks for the session ‘Access to Finances Locally for Women Through Gender Budgeting,’ co-organised by SI and the Women for Water Partnership.

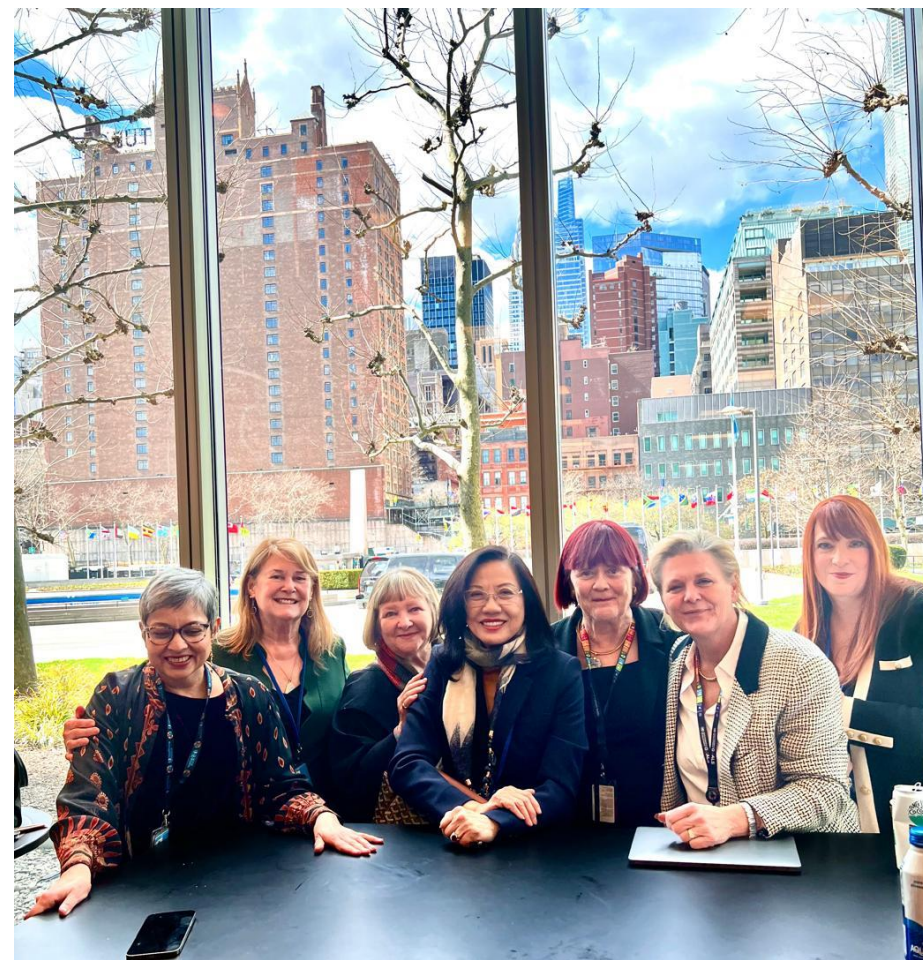
Both experiences offered valuable opportunities for learning and sharing insights on critical issues affecting women and collaboration with like-minded organisations.



CSW68



Hosting the SI reception for about 90 attendees of CSW68 allowed me to foster meaningful connections with inspiring leaders from our Federations and UN Centres.



'Save Mother Earth'



Whilst in New York, I was encouraged and inspired by our SI Advocacy Advisors, Beverly Bucur and Linda Witong, along with Leigh Ellwood Brown, our Director of Advocacy, to organise a webinar for World Earth Day themed 'Planet vs. Plastics'. Held on 23 April, the educational webinar was well-received, and featured several experts, I affectionately referred to as our "planetary doctors." we had three speakers: Kusum Athukorala discussing issues related to water, Mary Muai addressing food security, and Dr. Ngozi focused on health, with each presentation highlighting the overarching theme of plastic. They discussed ways we could "save mother earth, save the future," shedding light on the root causes of environmental degradation and providing actionable solutions to heal and protect our planet for generations to come.

"SAVE MOTHER EARTH, SAVE THE FUTURE"
WEBINAR
WORLD EARTH DAY
THEME: "PLANET VS. PLASTICS"

SPEAKERS

 Siew Yong Gnanalingam <small>SI PRESIDENT 2024-2025</small>	 Leigh Ellwoodbrown <small>DIRECTOR OF ADVOCACY</small>	 Dr. Ngozi <small>EDUCATOR, PHARMACEUTICAL CHEMIST</small>	 Kusum Athukorala <small>CHAIR OF GLOBAL WATER PARTNERSHIP SOUTH ASIA (GWP SAS)</small>	 Linda Witong <small>SI ADVOCACY ADVISOR 2024 - 2025</small>
 Mary Muia <small>SIAF 2024 PRESIDENT ELECT</small>	 Dr. Saradha Narayanan <small>GENERAL PHYSICIAN</small>	 Bulgamaa <small>MONGOLIAN YOUNG LEADERS NETWORK</small>	 Ulla Madsen <small>SI ADVOCACY ADVISOR</small>	 Sandra Hanns <small>HOLISTIC FINANCIAL EDUCATOR ENVIRONMENTAL SPEAKER & CONSULTANT</small>

SISEAP Conference



My first attendance at a Federation conference was the SISEAP Conference at the Gold Coast, Queensland, Australia, in early May.



SISEAP Conference



I had the privilege of speaking in the session 'A Climate for Change - the Power of Community and Commitment,' where I presented on environmental sustainability with the theme, 'Together we Heal Mother Earth.'



Protect the planet



Call to action

PROTECTING OUR PLANET STARTS WITH YOU 

<p>BIKE MORE DRIVE LESS</p> 	<p> reduce REUSE recycle</p> <p>Cut down on what you throw away. Follow the three "R's" to conserve natural resources and landfill space.</p>	<p>choose sustainable</p>  seafood <p>Learn how to make smart seafood choices at www.FishWatch.gov.</p>	<p>Trees provide food and oxygen. They help save energy, clean the air, and help combat climate change.</p>  PLANT A TREE
<p> EDUCATE</p> <p>When you further your own education, you can help others understand the importance and value of our natural resources.</p>	<p>CONSERVE WATER</p>  The less water you use, the less runoff and wastewater that eventually end up in the ocean.	<p> -SHOP- WISELY</p> <p>Buy less plastic and bring a reusable shopping bag.</p>	<p> Don't send chemicals into our waterways.</p> <p>Choose nontoxic chemicals in the home and office.</p>
<p>Volunteer!</p>  Volunteer for cleanups in your community. You can get involved in protecting your watershed too!	<p> Long-lasting light bulbs - ARE A - BRIGHT IDEA</p> <p>Energy efficient light bulbs reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Also flip the light switch off when you leave the room!</p>		

oceanservice.noaa.gov

SIA Philippines Region Conference



Shortly after, I attended the SIA Philippines Region Conference at the special invitation of Gigie Penalosa, the Region Governor. There, I spoke on the theme 'Fostering women's empowerment through education'.



The conference was incredibly inspiring, marked by a large turnout of engaged attendees. I was also inspired by the speech of incoming region Governor Marivic Paras with her biennial theme 'Soroptimist Go Green.'



World Environment Day



On World Environment Day, I was privileged to deliver an opening message in a video showcasing best practices from SI HQ.



[Climate change](#)
United Nations • Climate change refers to long-term shifts in temperatures and weather patterns. Human activities have been the main driver of climate change, primarily due to the burning of fossil fuels like coal, oil and gas.



SI President Siew Yong Gnanalingam - World Environment Day Message
Soroptimist Global
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48th Soroptimist of the Americas Biennial Convention



My next trip took me to Seattle, where I attended SIA's 48th Biennial Conference, which centered on the theme 'Reaching Higher'. I was honoured to serve as the flag bearer for the SI flag during the opening country member flag ceremony.



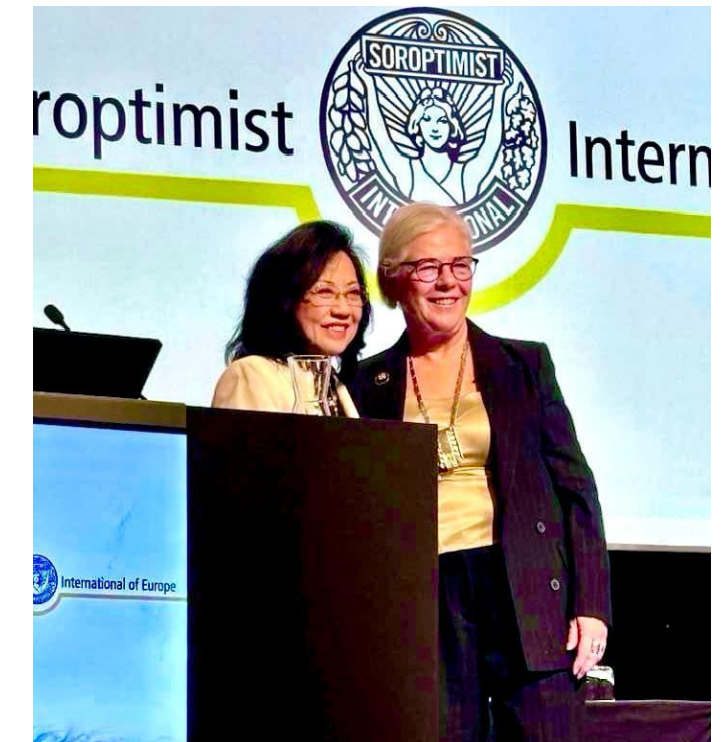
I had the honour of delivering a speech in an introductory session titled 'Opening Friendship General'. The following day, I was delighted to give opening remarks and introduce our SI UN Representatives in the session 'Local and Global Together: Soroptimist International'. It was both a pleasure and a privilege to speak and hear about the invaluable contributions of our SI representatives at the UN centres. Their efforts help bridge the grassroots work of our Federations with the global stage at the UN, ensuring our voice for women and girls is heard through our statements and participation at key meetings.



SIE Governors' Meeting: Iceland



48th Soroptimist International of the Americas Biennial Convention in Bellevue, Washington, USA, centered on the theme 'Reaching Higher', and I was honoured to serve as the flag bearer for the SI flag during the opening country member flag ceremony. I was invited to the SIE Governors' meeting in Iceland and I had the privilege of being one of four participants to light candles during the official opening ceremony.



SIE Governors' Meeting: Iceland



On the day before, I was very impressed by the three leading scientists from the Icelandic Met Office and the University of Iceland who provided a deep dive into their research on climate patterns and nature's unpredictability at a workshop titled 'Nature Reigns, Man Learns'.

Their work in monitoring and forecasting Iceland's unique natural phenomena was both enlightening and relevant to the global climate discussion.



Research



Impacts on natural systems

Oceanic systems

Climate change impacts on natural systems is widespread, obvious and evidence shows that it is increasing

- Ocean warming has led to new invasive species in Icelandic waters
- Shifts in fish habitats are observed and expected to continue with warming
 - Habitat of cold water species shrinks
 - Habitat of warm water species expands
 - Species at the south coast migrate north of Iceland

Patterns of projected changes in future suitable thermal habitat, typified by a) cod, b) Norway pout, c) monkfish, and d) lumpfish in 2061–2080 relative to 2000–2018 under emission scenarios SSP2-4.5, (left) and SSP5-8.5 (right). (Mason et al, 2021)

Impacts on natural systems

Oceanic systems

Climate change impacts on natural systems is widespread, obvious and evidence shows that it is increasing

(Freydís Vignúsdóttir, 2021)

Impacts on agriculture

Enhanced productivity of plants will probably be positive for agriculture

- An increase in the number of degree days usually benefits crop production, however changes drought conditions may pose a problem
- Icelandic agriculture is sensitive to overseas supply chain disruptions
 - The effect on different agricultural sectors warrants further study

(Ljósni, Bjarni D Sigurðsson) (Vikublaðið) (Brynja Hrafnkelsdóttir)

Heating degree day sums under SSP3-7.0

Next decades

Past evolution and future changes based on emission scenarios

Model temperature evolution for historic runs, and scenarios

- In the coldest and warmest scenarios the projected warming from 1986 – 2015 average to 2100 is 1 °C and 3.5 °C
- Projected warming in intermediate scenarios is 2 – 2.8 °C

Evolution of temperature

Observations, models, intermediate scenarios (SSP2-4.5 & SSP3-7.0)

SIE Governors' Meeting: Iceland



Following the workshop, we set off on a short 15-minute drive for the next activity - power plant visit and ski lodge social.

At the third-largest geothermal power plant in the world, we received an introduction to the city's ingenious use of geothermal energy to heat homes, discovered how Iceland leads the way in 100% renewable energy, and enjoyed the stunning landscapes that surround the plant.



CHOGM

Before I conclude, I would appreciate if I could take a minute or two to highlight my attendance at CHOGM in Samoa recently with the main purpose to speak on the statement on 'The Necessity of a New Optional Protocol to CEDAW to End Violence Against Women and Girls' at the side event on 'Gender Based Violence - a Joined Up Approach' organised by the CBWN.

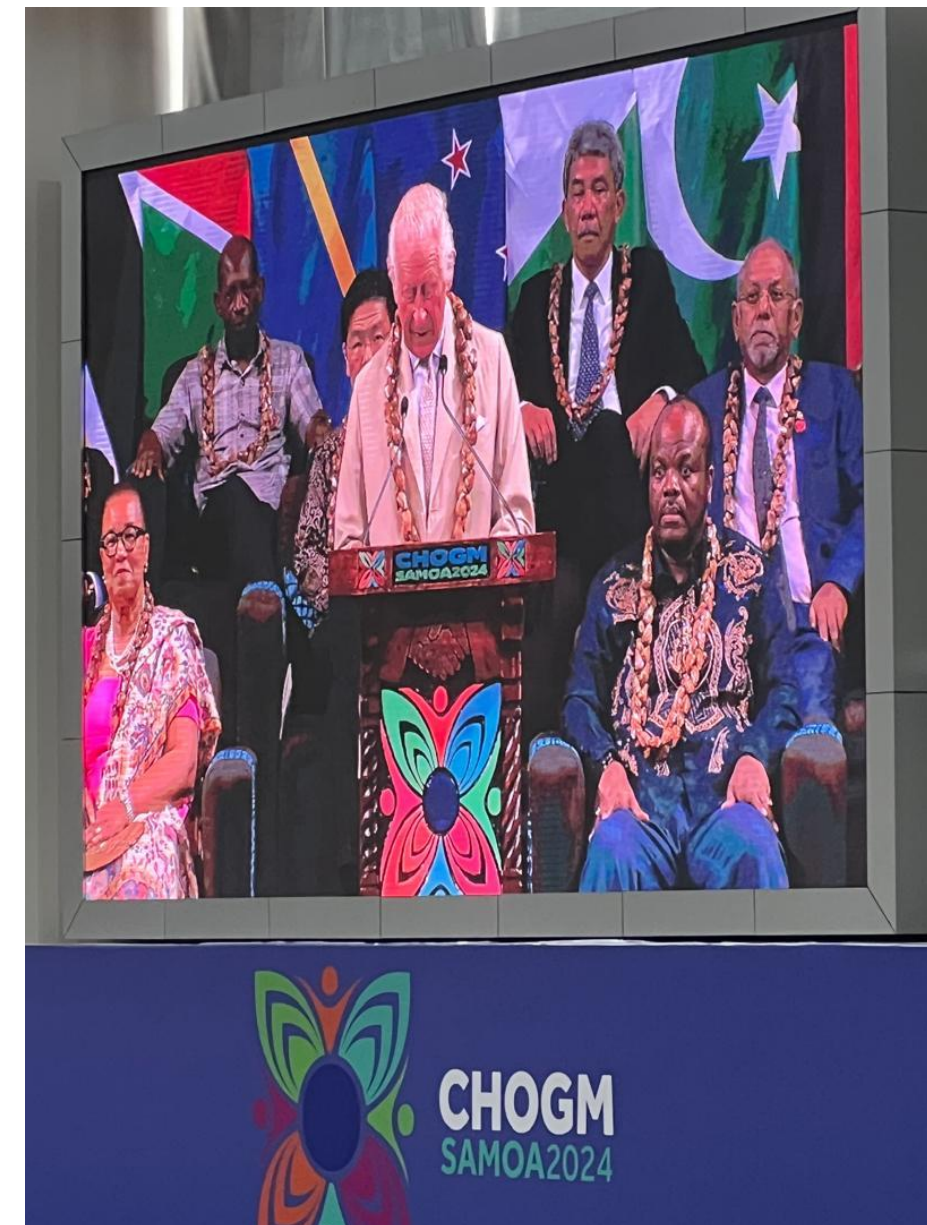
SI made a call to action for member states to support a treaty to stop violence against women in the form of an optional protocol to CEDAW based on general resolution number 35. There are 56 member states within the commonwealth, with soroptimists within 35 of those states. Our goal is to take the call to action for support of the optional protocol, into each session to encourage as many as possible of the member states to support our goal. We, EWT and SI, currently have 15 member states supporting the treaty. Ideally, we need national advocacy from all member states.



CHOGM

At the opening ceremony of CHOGM with the theme, 'One Resilient Common Future: Transforming our Commonwealth', His Majesty King Charles III as guest of honour said he has in the past spoken on "existential threats of climate change". He elaborated that climate change is recently raised as a primary concern, again and again. The King added "it's well past the problem for the future, as it's undermining the development gains long fought for." He talked about the terrifying storms in the Caribbean, devastating floods in eastern Africa and catastrophic wildfires in Canada.

As lives, livelihoods and human rights are at risk, the King encouraged actions to take care of reducing carbon emissions, build resilience to current and forecast impacts of climate change and restoring and conserving nature, both at sea and on land". I must add that there was huge emphasis at CHOGM on the urgency of maintaining the planet's resilience due to climate change.



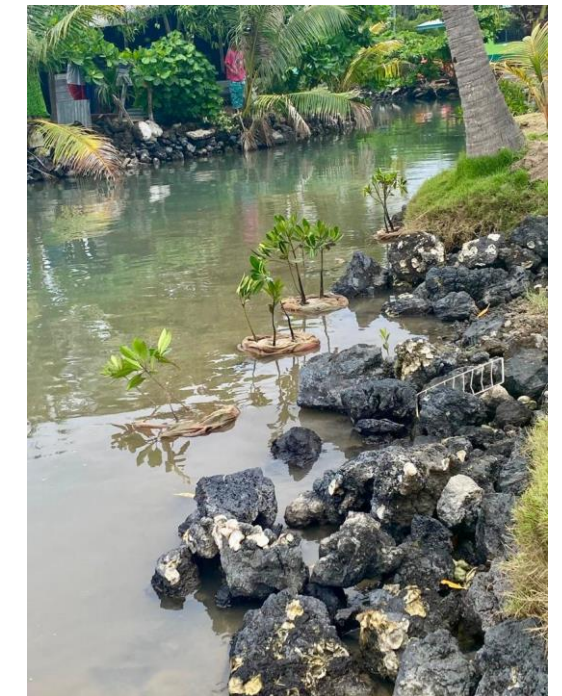
CHOGM



SI Samoa

It was an added opportunity during my visit to connect with SI Samoa and the honour of launching their initiative to support a mobile medical clinic in Savaii, Samoa.

This project will make a big difference to the health and well-being of the residents of Savaii. SI delegates were also invited to attend the launch of a mangrove replanting ceremony which is a rotary international project at Salemoa.



Chennai, India invitation



I'm also honoured to share that I've received an invitation from Nisha Ghosh, President of the National Association of SI India (NASI), one of your regions, to visit Chennai, India as chief guest at the inauguration of the new club, SI Chennai-Marina.

I am so honored to be able to witness and welcome the new club during this trip. I look forward to engaging in a series of exciting activities that underscore our collective global mission.



Our global strength



As I stand here today, reflecting on all the experiences I've had and the amazing soroptimist sisters I've met, I'm reminded of the incredible power of our global network.

Whether it's through our grassroots efforts, our work at the UN, or the impact of our projects in communities around the world, we are truly making a difference. the diversity and strength of our organisation gives me hope for the future together, we are creating lasting change for women and girls everywhere.

The Journey Ahead



The journey ahead may be challenging, but with the unity, creativity, and commitment that defines Soroptimist International.

I am confident that we will continue to break barriers, build stronger communities, and empower future generations.

Thank you for being a vital part of this journey.

I truly appreciate the work you do and what you hope to achieve together for the coming years.

Thank you for your patience too!

Thank you

